

Letter Supporting Rural Health Care Reform

June 19, 2009

The Honorable Charles B. Rangel

Chairman

House Committee on Ways & Means

1 102 Longworth HOB

Washington, D.C. 205 15

The Honorable Dave Camp

Ranking Member

House Committee on Ways & Means

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The Honorable Henry A. Waxman

Chairman

House Committee on Energy and Commerce

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The Honorable Joe Barton

Ranking Member

House Committee on Energy and Commerce

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The Honorable George Miller

Chairman

House Committee on Education and Labor

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The Honorable John Kline

Ranking Member

House Committee on Education and Labor

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Washington, D.C. 205 15

Dear Gentlemen:

As Co-Chairman of the House Rural Health Care Coalition, I respectfully urge you to consider the unique health care needs of rural Americans when crafting health care reform legislation. Rural Americans face a unique combination of factors and challenges that create certain health care disparities not found in urban areas and it is important that these issues be considered in the upcoming health reform deliberations.

Currently, 50 million Americans live in areas with too few providers to meet their basic primary care needs. At the same time, rural Americans face inherent demographic challenges placing them at even greater odds than their urban counterparts: per capita, most rural populations are older, poorer, and sicker. While health coverage is vitally important for these communities, the even greater crisis facing rural America is access to care. After all, it does not matter if you have health insurance if you cannot find a doctor to administer the care you need. A useful, productive health reform package cannot be arrived at without recognizing the unique needs of this critically underserved population.

Three reforms are crucial to increase health coverage and access to care for rural Americans:

- The workforce shortage crisis must be abated;

- Equity in reimbursement must occur; and
- Health disparities must be eliminated, vulnerable populations must be protected, and disparities in infrastructure must be corrected.

Addressing the workforce shortage involves a simple yet multi-faced approach, involving improving and expanding the National Health Service Corps; expanding Title VII of the Social Security Act to address needed health profession education improvements; augmenting rural residency programs by enhancing rural training track definitions; and creating incentives for rural medical professions.

Additionally, rural residents display greater inherent health risks, and, therefore, Medicare reimbursement must, at a minimum, be equivalent to urban provider levels.

Finally, access to vulnerable populations in rural America must improve. This includes addressing mental health disparities; improving rural veteran health care; providing greater outreach for rural uninsured children; and recognizing the need for increased health research.

As your health care reform discussions progress, we urge you to recognize the role rural America plays in providing broad coverage and access to every American citizen. If you have any questions or concerns regarding rural health care issues, please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

JERRY MORAN

Member of Congress